

1. Describe the practice proposed for recognition, and list its objectives. Detail how the practice is innovative, how it promotes high student achievement and how it can be replicated.

The district has established a *Forensics Program in Oratorical Declamation* for students in Grades 5 through 8 as the second in a multiple-step public speaking program, to follow its successful Forensics Program in Interpretive Reading in Grades 5 – 8. Students select a speech once given by a living person, memorize, practice, and finally deliver it in the spirit of the original orator at a district wide tournament.

The practice is open to all interested, motivated students in grades 5 – 8. Brochures are sent home detailing the program for students, inviting parents to train as coaches/judges, and announcing the date of the culminating district wide tournament. Interested teachers may also volunteer as coaches/judges. Students register their commitment to the program by signing a contract witnessed by a parent. The time frame from the inauguration of the program until tournament day is 6 – 8 weeks.

The objectives of the oratorical declamation program are to have students:

1. Develop public speaking skills through the interpretation of appropriate speech selections.
2. Encourage students to acquire public speakers as role models.
3. Become familiar with effective oral/verbal patterns in public speaking with an ear toward imitation.
4. Interpret a declamation selection satisfactorily so as to convey to the listeners the intent and spirit of the original orator.
5. Participate in a district wide forensics tournament to demonstrate development of public speaking skills.
6. Become continually stronger in oral communication skills as they participate in multiple tournaments.
7. Become increasingly poised and self-confident in the public speaking arena.
8. Transfer skills mastered in the forensics program to use in everyday situations in school, at home and in the community.

The program is innovative in many ways. Guiding the child to choosing a piece at an appropriate level is critical to student success; pieces are edited to be of 4 – 7 minutes in duration when recited. Each student meets a trained coach (volunteer parent or teacher) in two individual, fifteen-minute coaching sessions per week. Forensics practice schedules are posted in accord with teachers' and coaches' availability. Children report to practice from a regular class or lunch period. The child reads, and later recites as he/she memorizes the speech; the coach stresses one or two skills that need improvement. The child practices these skills daily at home. Finally, children participate in a district tournament (fifth and sixth graders compete at the Junior Varsity level, seventh and eighth graders at the Varsity level). They recite/interpret their orations in two rounds in a classroom setting, competing against a different, small group of peers and evaluated by a different judge in each round. All participants are honored in a final awards ceremony.

The practice promotes high student achievement. After each coaching session, the student receives a critique sheet which accentuates his/her strengths while stressing one or two skills that need to be mastered through practice before the next coaching session. The accumulated sheets show the student his/her progress throughout the course of the program. File card entries, initialed by the coach, enable the next coach to continue from where the previous one left off so the student is aware of constant, steady improvement which provides intrinsic motivation to sign up again. Each successive time the student enters the program, he/she starts at his previous best level and continues to advance from there.

The program can be easily replicated by inviting teachers from other schools to visit the program in action; by training a lead person/team from each school; and by providing them with the necessary materials to run a successful program in their school; experienced advisors will be on call as needed. Ideally, when many of the county's schools have active forensics programs in oratorical declamation in place, a countywide after-school tournament can be held to offer students greater challenge and broader experience.

2. Describe the educational needs of students that the practice addresses and how they were identified. List the *Core Curriculum Content and/or Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards* that the practice addresses.

Everyday, students must communicate orally when they answer questions in class, suggest solutions in cooperative groups, speak with peers and adults in person or on the phone, play a role in a mock trial, or speak with expression and understanding, etc. Students cannot get through the day without speaking to others to convey what they need or want, how they think or feel, or to find out what they need to know. Students need to be able to speak well in public, an important, invaluable life skill. Developing effective oral communication skills is an essential component of a good education and is, therefore, worthy of development.

The *Forensics Program in Oratorical Declamation* is open to all interested students in grades 5 – 8. Students' needs are identified on an individual basis. During each coaching session, the coach evaluates the speaker and fills out a critique sheet, citing one or two skills the student most needs to develop; for example, pace, vocal variety, eye contact, enunciation, phrasing, expression, appropriate gestures and movements, or recreation of the spirit of the original orator. The student concentrates on those particular skills in daily practice between sessions. The coach records on a student file card what skills have been addressed so the next coach is aware of the student's progress. Whatever the entry level, every student who participates improves with every coaching session. When tournament time arrives, the child is at his/her own personal best. Each successive time the child enters the forensics program, he/she begins at his/her previous best level, and continues to improve from there. Mastered skills spill over into other educational and social areas, building the student's poise, confidence, and self esteem.

As demonstrated above, this practice undoubtedly provides services leading to high student achievement. It addresses *Standard 3.1 of the Language Arts Literacy List of Standards*, "All students will speak for a variety of real purposes and audiences in a variety of contexts. The following Cumulative Progress Indicators of Standard 3.1 fall within the boundaries of this practice:

Standard 3.1.2. Adjust oral communications for different purposes and audiences. (*Speak with expression to entertain or persuade*).

Standard 3.1.3. Use oral communication to influence the behavior of others. (*Speak to evoke various emotions*).

Standard 3.1.9. Speak before a group to express thoughts and ideas, convey an opinion, present information, and tell a story. (*Present a speech in the spirit of the original orator to stir up those feelings in the listeners that the speech writer intended*).

Standard 3.1.14. Use visual aids and nonverbal behaviors to support spoken messages. (*Use eye contact, facial expression and gestures appropriately to enhance presentations*).

Standard 3.1.16. Speak before a group to defend an opinion and present an oral interpretation. (*Present your speech to parents, teachers, relatives and friends in two rounds at the district wide tournament*).

Standard 3.1.19. Receive and use constructive feedback to improve speaking ability. (*Act on coaches' and judges' critiques and tournament rankings to improve next presentation*).

3. Document the assessment measures used to determine the extent to which the objective of the practice have been met.

In the *Forensics Program in Oratorical Declamation*, evaluation is individual and ongoing. Both formal and informal measures of assessment are employed.

Informal feedback is available to participants in the practice. On the day of the tournament, students present their speeches to two different classes as a warm-up for the event. For the next several days, teachers and students comment on their performances. There is also a camaraderie among the contestants themselves as they offer constructive feedback to each other following the tournament. In addition, the program teacher receives both solicited and unsolicited feedback from classroom teachers who usually notice a distinct improvement in the oral communication skills of students participating in the practice both in the classroom setting and in public presentations.

Formal assessment measures used are:

1. Critique sheets.

Formal, printed critique sheets require coaches and/or judges to comment on each participant's speech. Among the critical questions included are: Does the contestant capture and project the spirit of the original orator? Does the speaker use vocal variety to enhance his/her presentation? Meaningful eye contact and/or gestures? Is the speaker comfortable with the selection? Well practiced? Students receive critique sheets to let them know not only their strengths but also several ways to improve their delivery next time.

2. File card entries.

Since a child is not always coached by the same individual, file card entries are used to make a smooth transition between coaches. Subsequent coaches know at a glance how many coaching sessions a student has had, what strengths were demonstrated and what weaknesses need to be addressed. The current coach can begin building skills where the last one left off, thus providing the student with gradual, constant improvement throughout the course of the program.

3. Tournament ballots.

Tournament ballots are used by judges to evaluate performances of speakers assigned to their rooms for a round, and to rank those same readers in comparison with one another. Evaluations of A+, A, A-, B+, B and B- are converted to numerical equivalents which are added to ranks to get individual scores for each contestant for the round. Scores from both rounds are totaled to yield final scores. Total scores are used to determine tournament award winners and also to allow students to measure their accomplishments against all competitors in the tournament.

Whether the assessment in this practice is formal or informal, it is clear that program participants are able to apply their newly-learned oratorical declamation skills confidently, not only in the tournament arena, but also in class and other social situations. There is a definite indication that the only way for students to go in the *Forensics Program in Oratorical Declamation* is up!